

Columbia College Chicago Digital Commons @ Columbia College Chicago

Season Ticket

Publications

Spring 4-1-2001

The Season Ticket, Spring 2001

Columbia College Chicago

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.colum.edu/seasonticket>



Part of the [Theatre and Performance Studies Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Columbia College Chicago, "The Season Ticket, Spring 2001" (2001). *Season Ticket*. 26.
<https://digitalcommons.colum.edu/seasonticket/26>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Publications at Digital Commons @ Columbia College Chicago. It has been accepted for inclusion in Season Ticket by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Columbia College Chicago. For more information, please contact drossetti@colum.edu.

The Season Ticket

Columbia College Theater Department

Spring 2001

Inside this edition of
The Season Ticket...



- Congratulate Bill Williams for receiving the George Nathan Award
- Get the Scoop on the *The Gift Horse*, This year's Theodore Ward Award winning play
 - Go duck hunting with Jeff Ginsberg
- Take Scotland by storm with Tom Mula and Sheldon Patinkin
- A look back at John Murbach and Martin de Maat
 - And Much, Much More!!!

Congratulations to Bill Williams!

For those of you who don't know, the grace, authority, and perceptiveness that Bill Williams, co-head of the musical theater program and also the teacher of Singing for the Actor I and II is also the head theater critic for the *Chicago Reader*. This year, Bill has been awarded the George Jean Nathan Award for Dramatic Criticism. This award, which is nominated by authors, critics, and reviewers from all over the U.S. is voted on by the chairs and experts in the English Departments of Princeton, Cornell and Yale Universities. "We found much to admire in

characterize Albert Williams as a critic of drama. Williams writes the kind of criticism for which the George Jean Nathan Prize was designed - incisive, thorough, confident in the intelligence of its readers and convinced that the theatre makes a difference to the city in which it occurs."

Congratulations Bill!

Ride *The Gift Horse* with director Shirley Jo Finney

This year's Theodore Ward African-American Playwriting Contest winner was *The Gift Horse*, by Lydia Diamond and directed by Shirley Jo Finney. The story centers around Ruth and the two most important people in her life, Ernesto, her best friend and Brian, her psychiatrist and her eventual husband. It is a narrative starting back in Ruth's college days and taking the audience through the most difficult times of her life. "The play is about accepting one's self and one's life, understanding the gifts of love and life, and how to keep surviving moment to moment," Shirley Jo explains. "The characters begin putting weight on the outside world for validation, and eventually they find the validation within themselves."

Victor Mahler, this year's Michael Merritt student Designer-in-Residence was the scenic designer for the show. He and Shirley Jo looked to communicate several things with the set. Because Ruth and Jordan are both artists, the foundation of the set stemmed from the concept of an artist's studio. Both Shirley Jo and Victor also wanted to present the idea of being inside someone's head with the set. Through various discussions, a multi-leveled set, completely draped in muslin, without any specific entrances or exits that could be identified, was created. Because Shirley Jo and her design team agreed that *The Gift Horse* is a character driven piece, the set needed to support the space-time continuum and the lights would help isolate areas for more specific purposes.

This is the second year that Shirley Jo has been with us at Columbia and working with playwrights on new works is noth-

ing foreign to her. "It is a process of strengthening and clarification," she says about working on a script with a playwright. For the actors, working a new script can sometimes be difficult. "You have to break down the script metaphysically and emotionally for the actors. It is still an investigation of human behavior. This show is especially challenging due to the concept of dealing with relationships and committing to the vulnerability needed to maintain the integrity of the play."

Within the play, several folklore histories are discussed as to where the cliché "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth" came from. For this play, Finney believes that it is ultimately about receiving a gift you are given graciously. The gift of life, of love, of understanding or even the gift of friendship are all things that human beings can unknowingly take advantage of from time to time. This show's gift to the audience is to take them on an emotional journey and evoke conversation and thought. It is not afraid to publicly face how society is redefining the nuclear family image and shows how different people face their fears and mistakes.

Contributors to this edition of *The Season Ticket*:

Ali Dornheggen
Susan Padveen
Shirley Jo Finney
Jeff Ginsberg
Tom Mula
Sheldon Patinkin
Anne Libera

Conquering *The Wild Duck* with Jeff Ginsberg

One of the other great mainstage productions this season was Henrik Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* directed by faculty member Jeff Ginsberg. Taking place in 1884, Gregers Werle returns to his father's home and faces an unwelcoming society. It is the story of "a zealot who nurses his wounds from the betrayal of an estranged father by creating havoc on a school chum's life. He forces his old friend to see his life and accept the realities. In turn, this reality check causes the old friend's (Hjalmar Ekdal) life to fall apart," says Ginsberg. "This play is about the need to perceive people as individuals, personal rules of conduct and different ways of seeing the vulnerability of individuals."

This is the first opportunity Jeff has had to explore this genre as a director. He felt his biggest challenge was to "enliven a classic and make it accessible to a 20th century audience. There are timeless questions about truths and lies. We all live with secrets and we all bury things inside. These secrets are things that people need to maintain so that it won't destroy them and so they can move on with a better life."

Ginsberg chose to keep the play in the year that it was written because some of the themes were still more authentic to the time. He was also interested in the transformation of portrait painting to photographs and the art of retouching photography. The idea of retouching a photograph can be translated into the need to retouch a life with reality. There is also an element of breaking down the vanity that exists.

The play presented the challenge of keeping within the period as well as keeping it engaging for the audience. "The language

is very pedestrian, it is the plot and the characters as well as their relationships that really drive the play. The characters are driven by their actions as opposed to what they say."

Assisting Ginsberg in his challenge to conquer *The Wild Duck* were lighting designer Margaret Nelson, scenic designer Jackie Penrod, costume designer Frances Maggio and sound designer Lindsay Jones.



The sheep have arrived, and
nothing is safe...

This year, the Freshman Performance Projects have taken on a whole new level. The semester began with *BAAA*, a collaboration directed by Holly Quinn and Susan Padveen, and written by the ensemble. The show was based on the story by David MacAuley about the end of civilization. Using music, movement, text, and a great deal of humor, the students and faculty created a world where greed and ego caused simple, fluffy sheep to eat each other. "After waiting to adapt this story for years, it was great to see it on its feet," said Susan Padveen.

Don't miss the chance to check out the third and final freshman performance project, *The Adventures of Tom Thumb* by Henry Fielding, author of *Tom Jones*, and directed by Susan Osborne-Mott. It will be performing in the Getz Theater May 6-10.

Taking Scotland by storm with Tom Mula and Sheldon Patinkin

Co-directors Tom Mula and Sheldon Patinkin took on the final mainstage production of the year, Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. This classic tale of an overnight success facing his ultimate doom was played out in the New Studio Theater April 25th through May 6th.

Both directors' ideas of the play are stated in two very short sentences. For Tom, he quotes Chris Issak with the song lyric "They did a bad, bad thing, they did a bad, bad thing." "Two people make a mistake. If things sound too good to be true, they probably are. Macbeth is a sucker," states Mula.

For Sheldon, he finds what the play is about directly from the text. As Lady Macbeth states in Act 5 scene 1, "What's done cannot be undone." For Sheldon, working on the play was more about understanding what was so tragic about the story. The idea that power can corrupt or even the promise of power can corrupt, that even good people can become evil; and that violence exists in everyone were all ideas that Sheldon kept in mind as he considered the play. "Macbeth is a great warrior, a killing machine on the battlefield, but he brings these same qualities into his private life and into his reign as king, where they don't belong."

When discussing the show with their design team, both directors were specific about what they were looking for in terms of the general feeling. Both wanted a cold show to contribute to the tense drama. Tom and Sheldon wanted an era where sword fighting was common, and they definitely did not want any kilts. For

practical and metaphorical purposes, a multi-leveled set was needed along with the ability to make people appear and disappear on stage.

The design team consisted of David Siegel for sets, Frances Maggio for costumes, Victor Mahler for lights and George Ducker for sound.

Siegel attacked the scenic design with ideas of crossroads and choices for what he wanted to communicate. Frances Maggio looked to textured fabrics to give a rougher quality, and kept the colors dark. Victor Mahler chose to fill the stage with several uncommon and low light sources for the show, as well as some very special lighting effects for the witches.

For students, working on a Shakespeare piece is always a learning experience. Sheldon and Tom are happy that this turned out to be just as much a learning experience for them as well. Every detail is important in making the story comprehensible. For example, "each of the thanes is different and very specific. It is difficult because they deliver so much exposition, but each actor has really done his homework. We are in the business of training people, and therefore it was important for us to challenge those actors. Plus, it makes it more interesting for us, them and the audience," Mula states.

Remembering John Murbach and Martin de Maat: a look at two of Columbia's great teachers

John Murbach passed away on Christmas Day after a brief illness. "He was a gentle, very kind, very funny man. His death was very sudden and totally unexpected. This is quite a big loss for us all," - Sheldon Patinkin, Theater Department Chair.

"Murbach taught for more than ten years in the Columbia College Chicago Theater Department, teaching scenic design and designing shows for the department. He also designed for many theaters in Chicago. I first met John in 1983, when he was assistant-designing *Kabuki Macbeth* for Wisdom Bridge Theatre. In the years since, we worked together on many shows, including *Straight Arrows* at Wisdom Bridge; *As You Like It*, *Dr. Faustus*, *Falstaff*, *Richard III*, and *Romeo & Juliet* at Oak Park Festival Theatre, and *Tartuffe* at Columbia. Most recently, John designed Sheldon's production of *Long Day's Journey into Night*.

"John was a great problem solver. He was a craftsman and a highly skilled scene painter. He was also a great collaborative artist, and enjoyed working with the other designers on a production," - Mary Badger.

"John was a designer of great innovation and imagination. One of the things I admired most about him was that his sets, all great-looking, were visual essays on what the plays were about. (I know that's what designers are supposed to do, but it doesn't happen all that often, really.) His *Romeo & Juliet* set was a pretty puzzle-box of walls and boundaries; his set for *Tartuffe* was a

rich man's house suspended in front of a heavenly sky.

"Murbach was good to work with, too. There was very little ego about John, his work was always about serving the play, solving the play's problems, and serving up the play to the audience. He always had another good idea, and he always came in on budget.

"He was good at creating a world where all the elements came together. The main thing about John is that he really made himself available to his students and their needs. He was constantly generous with his time and cared about everyone in his class," Francis Maggio.

"John and I were close, years ago. We went to a lot of parties together, and we drifted apart a bit over the years. But I always thought of John as a friend, someone I enjoyed, enjoyed being with, felt comfortable around, and respected as an artist. We laughed together a great deal, and sat together at the back of faculty meetings.

"Nobody gets out of here alive. Why should a friend's death upset us any more than someone moving to LA? I guess because it's so final, to our way of thinking. We'll never see them again, never talk and joke with them again, never share a cocktail or a dirty joke, never again have the inspiration of their ideas, their wry wit, their friendship.

"If you've got something to say to someone, say it now, while they can still hear it. Don't wait until someone asks you to write a memorial.

"John, you'll be missed."

-Tom Mula

Every once in a while, a person comes into your life and affects you in a way that is often thought impossible. It might be a smile, a conversation, etc, but it changes the way you look at that particular day. Marty de Maat was one of those people. Marty was an improv teacher here at Columbia, and the artistic director of the training center at Second City, among many other things. But he was not a just a teacher, he was a nurturer, a father-figure, a mentor, and a friend. For those who have been lucky enough to have had a class with him, you know exactly what I am talking about. You would enter into Marty's world, and you were safe there - nothing could harm you. Marty did not use improv as just a way to develop as an actor, he used it to teach you how to live your life. He lived every day like it was his last, and he brought joy to every person who had any contact with him.

Marty was, no, he *is* the best person at being a human being that I have ever encountered. We should all strive for that. But for those of you who never had the benefit of having a class, sharing Baskin-Robbins, Thanksgiving dinner, a dirty martini, or any other life experience with him, these are some of our stories, memories and lessons that we shared with him. I know small anecdotes cannot do justice to the impact that Marty had on the students here at Columbia, and everywhere else he taught, but they may help you to remember why we are all doing this crazy thing called theater, and why we all

We'll miss you, John and Marty.

must play.

- Ali Dornheggen

I think what I'll remember most about Marty was that when he was with a student he was wholly present to that particular being, giving 150% of what he had to offer. At the Second City Training Center, when the results of the Level 2 auditions were posted, Martin would sit in the little dark staircase between the mainstage and the ETC theaters and talk to the students who had not passed the audition. He'd spend enormous amounts of time with each one, talking them through their disappointment. By the time he was done, the students would not only feel better about the audition, but Martin would have convinced them that not passing into Level 2 that term was the best thing that could have ever happened to them.

- Anne Libera

I first met Martin when he was about four and his aunt, Jo Forsberg, brought him to the Playwrights Theater Club to see a children's theater production of *Little Red Riding Hood* that she had directed. I played the wolf, and the kids were scared of me. After the show the cast would come out into the audience to meet them. I always took off the wolf head and paws before coming out, but Martin was the only audience member who wasn't afraid to come up to me and shake my hand. He said, and since this was nearly 50

years ago, I'm not quoting exactly here, "I kept on saying it's not really a wolf, it's a friend of Aunt Josephine's. So you didn't scare me too much." And then, with great seriousness, he asked, "Do you like scaring people?" I said, "No, not particularly, but that's my job in the play." And Martin said, and these were his exact words, "Play is good." At 4, he was already Martin. He was never really young, and he would never really be old.

I've always been in awe of Martin's ability to care about so many people so completely. As a teacher, he was even beyond caring; he was almost totally selfless. I don't know a student of his from the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, from Players Workshop, from Second City or from Columbia, who didn't feel nurtured by him and who didn't grow as an artist and as a person because of him. That's why turning the Second City Training Center over to him was an automatic decision. That's why having him as the head of the improv program at Columbia was an automatic decision. His job at Columbia also included holding faculty workshops to teach them how to teach the games by having them play them. They too felt nurtured and helped to grow by Marty. And me too, especially during the many years we taught an acting class together at Columbia and shared and adopted many of each other's teaching methods. And that's also when I found out that he was fun to argue with.

There's a place in my heart that will always hold Martin present. He'll be missed, but he'll never be gone.

- Sheldon Patinkin